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ABSTRACT

A survey of indicators of public support for public schools over the last two decades is used to predict trends in that support for the 1980s. Most indicators suggest that support for schools has weakened significantly in the last twenty years, primarily among the white middle and upper-middle classes. The implications of current demographic, socioeconomic, technological, and attitudinal trends are that schools will suffer further erosion of public support in this decade because of declining enrollments and a shift of the burden of support to poorer and politically weaker constituents. Private schools and microcomputers offer parents other attractive alternatives to public education. A few mediating factors in this otherwise pessimistic forecast include blacks' demonstrated support for public education, the increasing population of the South, higher taxpayer-to-student ratios, and the movement towards a more traditional learning environment. While the link between federal education policy and public support for schools is insubstantial, to prevent further decline in public support, the federal government should continue to maintain current levels of funding for programs for the disadvantaged and should initiate programs that are responsive to parental demands for educational choice, involvement, and improved quality. (WD)

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Public Support for Public Schools:

The Past, the Future, and the Federal Role

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Introduction

The linkage between the public and its representatives is the central dynamic of democratic systems. It is not the case that the public "decides" on every issue that arises; clearly it doesn't. Rather the public is important because its support is vital to representatives' continuation in office. Not immediately, perhaps, but over time failure to note and nurture that support, to give it as full a play as possible in the policy-making process, has historically resulted in defeat at the polls.

"Support" takes many forms within the complex set of mechanisms devised to express the linkage between public and representative. Support, or lack thereof, is not expressed merely through the act of voting or by "throwing the rascals out." In the case of the public schools, for example, support is manifested through a complex set of interactions--some symbolic, some real--involving such matters as voting in local and state finance referenda and state tax and spending limitation measures, election and reelection of persons to school boards, school litigation, and attitudes toward schools as measured by opinion polls.

It is important to understand that these mechanisms are merely surface indicators of public support for schools. The dynamic roots of that support are found in an array of societal forces--demographic, socio-economic, technological, and attitudinal. At present these underlying forces are undergoing fundamental and far-reaching change in this country. It is within this context of change that prospects for federal policy responses to anticipated public support for public schools in the eighties will be explored.

Public Support: The Last Two Decades

This section of the paper explores surface indicators of the public's approval or disapproval of public schools during the sixties and seventies. Several indicators are examined: patterns of voter turnout and support in local school finance referenda and the approval rates in those referenda, approval rates in nonschool finance referenda, outcomes of state tax and spending limitation measures, the election and reelection of school board members, legal action by citizens against the schools, and attitudes toward public schools as expressed in opinion polls.

School Finance Referenda

The examination of public support for public schools shall begin with a discussion of the changes in voter turnout and support for local tax and bond referenda and the corresponding impact on approval rates for those referenda during the last two decades. For "the collective act of the school referenda tells us much amout environment, demand inputs, and the political system of American schools" [Wirt & Kirst, 1972, p. 97].

Voter Turnout

Research on local school finance referenda conducted in 1950-70 consistently identified those most likely to vote as white, middle-aged, well-educated homeowners with a better-than-average income who had children in the public schools and who generally trusted public officials (Piele & Hall, 1973). Not only were the persons fitting this profile

the ones most likely to vote, they also composed what has generally been described as the "normal vote." That is, in a normal election persons with these characteristics for the most part make up the electorate.

This normal vote had other special qualities besides the characteristics of those who voted. It wasn't usually large, perhaps involving 20 percent or fewer of the registered voters. (In states requiring a higher minimum turnout for election validation, however, the normal vote could reach 60 percent.) Moreover, there was remarkable stability and predictability in both its size and composition across time in any given community. Furthermore, the reason that most school finance referenda passed throughout the country in 1950-70 was that the typical voter was also most likely a yes voter. In addition, two types of voters, though likely to vote yes, were not probable participants--younger voters and blacks.

Any increase in the turnout was frequently due to conflict in the community. Conflicts brought people to the polls who usually did not vote. When they did vote, they generally voted no. Among school officials who observed this phenomenon, it became an article of faith, strongly supported by empirical research, that the larger the referendum turnout the smaller the percentage of yes votes cast (Piele & Hall, 1973). Thus, the strategy adopted by most school districts was to maintain a low profile, avoid conflict, and hope for a normal--or less than normal--turnout.

But sometime in the late sixties the turnout-support relationship began to change (Alexander & Boss, 1974; Osman & Grubb, 1975; Taebel & Rosentraub, 1977; and Hall, 1977). No longer was there any significant

relationship between the size of the turnout and the direction of the vote, so no longer could school officials be certain of passing finance referenda with small turnouts. High turnout still, more often than not, brought election defeat (at least on first submission) as the lore maintained. But why did defeat occur with normal or less than normal turnout?

Perhaps the best explanation rests in the "cross-pressure" theory. This posits that persons whose normal voting pattern is disrupted by an issue or candidate that they cannot support will delay or withold their vote rather than cast a vote contrary to their normal predispositions. Accordingly, those who normally turned out to vote in favor of school referenda faced situations that made them unwilling to vote yes, e.g., size of budget, certain curricular decisions, or the closing of a neighborhood school. Faced with this conflict between the normal and the abnormal, they decided not to participate.

Cross-pressures may be a reasonable explanation for the decline in turnout among normal yes voters, but the theory unfortunately remains untested by any empirical research. One can infer such pressures from the recent turnout rates for school tax referenda among certain high turnout/high support districts in Oregon. Too, the inference is suggested by evidence that the greater the increase in the tax rate, the higher the probability of issue defeat (Gionocchi & Hamilton, 1972; Alexander & Boss, 1974; Osman & Grubb, 1975; Boss, 1976; Giles et al, 1976; and Rubinfeld, 1977). That is, the high and increasing cost of education may now be creating cross-pressures in persons normally predisposed to vote yes, resulting in a significant decline in the turnout

of those voters.

Voter Support

The profile of voters supporting local school finance referenda also underwent a change during the last two decades. Although younger, well-educated persons in professional or managerial occupations and with higher-than-average income continued to be the most likely yes voters in referenda (Piele & Hall, 1973; Hamilton & Cohen, 1973; Alexander & Bass, 1974; Giles, 1976; and Rubinfeld, 1977), support among those with children enrolled in the public schools declined.

It has been an accepted tenet among school administrators that parents with children in the public schools are more likely to vote in favor of school tax and bond referenda than those without children or with children in private schools. This assumption was supported by numerous empirical studies conducted from the fifties to the midsixties. Beginning then, however, and continuing through the seventies, public opinion polls and election studies began to report a decline in support for school financial referenda among public school parents.

For example, from 1969 through 1972, Gallup asked: "Suppose the local public schools said they needed much more money. As you feel at this time, would you vote to raise taxes for this purpose or would you vote against raising taxes for this purpose?" In 1969, 51 percent of public school parents said they would vote to raise taxes, versus only 40 percent of the private school parents and 41 percent of persons with no children in school who said they would. By 1972, however, the Gallup poll revealed virtually no difference among these three groups:

the responses were 37, 38, and 35 percent respectively (Piele & Hall, 1973). This decline has also been supported by empirical studies of local referenda (Alexander & Boss, 1974; Osman & Grubb, 1975; Hall & Piele, 1976; and Rubinfeld, 1977). It should be pointed out, however, that support among parents with children enrolled in elementary schools does not appear to have significantly declined. This conclusion, though unsupported by empirical research (to my knowledge, none has thus far been conducted), is widely substantiated by school administrators involved in tax and bond referenda campaigns throughout the country.

A second group of no voters has comprised those who feel alienated from the community and its decision-making process. If anything, rejection of bond and tax measures by alienated voters increased during the last two decades. Assuming the vote for George Wallace in 1968 provided a useful measure of alienation, Hall and Piele (1976) found that the alienation theory did indeed predict that precincts that had supported Wallace in the 1968 Oregon pirmary election would also oppose school finance measures. The connection was so strong that it cut across class lines of a precinct.

However, not all the shifts in voter support patterns have been negative during the sixties and seventies. For example, support among blacks, as measured by Gallup between 1969 and 1972, remained constant. Furthermore, other empirical evidence finds that blacks are more likely than whites to vote yes on school referenda (Piele & Hall, 1973). However, blacks have had a poor record of registering and turning out for local nonpartisan elections. Recent efforts by the Democratic party

in particular to register black voters, coupled with the greater education of blacks, have produced higher turnout among this group more recently. These efforts are particularly effective in referenda in cities. There, heavily black precincts have turned out in high numbers and cast significantly higher percentages of yes votes for referenda than have heavily white precincts.

Bond Approval Rates

Shifts in the turnout of probable yes voters are not the only indicators of adverse change in support for public schools during the sixties and seventies. These shifts are also linked to voting outcomes, i.e., the declining approval rates of bond and tax referenda. For example, bond approval rates measured by both the number of elections and the values of bonds has shown a consistent downward trend since the midsixties. The total number of bond referenda fell steadily from 1965 (N=2,041) to 1977 (N=858), as one would expect given the decline in enrollments and the decrease in the number of new schools being built. But the percentage approved has also declined from 74.7 percent in 1965 to 55.6 percent in 1977. During the same period, the percentage approved, based on the dollar value of the bond issues, declined from 79.4 percent in 1965 to 54 percent in 1977 (Condition of education, 1979).

Tax Approval Rates

While comparable nationwide data on voting in other types of school financial referenda are not available during the period, there is some evidence to suggest that these issues have fared no better. For example,

from 1965 to 1970, New York voters increased their proportion of budget rejections from 1.7 percent in 1965 to 20 percent in 1970 (Goettel, 1971). And by 1977 the percentage of budget defeats in New York had increased to 29 percent. In Missouri, of the 120 tax levy referenda in 1972, 29.2 percent were defeated; but three years later, when 115 referenda were held, those defeated had risen sharply to 47 percent. Similarly, in New Jersey, from 1965 to 1976, the number of these elections increased from 521 to 546, but the percentage of budgets defeated more than quadrupled (12.7 vs 56.6). In Ohio, from 1954 to 1969, the average percentage of yes votes for new school money issues declined from 72 to less than 50 percent (Kowalski, 1977).[1]

Nonschool Referenda

Clearly, in the last two decades, referenda voters did not indiscriminately reject every proposition that raised taxes. If they had, most of the schools in Oregon, Ohio, and New York would have long since been closed. Interests and values other than pocketbook protection were at work in public response to local tax allocation policy. For example, whereas public support for school referenda declined recently, support for certain other public services apparently held firm--perhaps even increased. While people were voting down local school levies in California, those for parks and beaches were doing well (Kirst, 1981). In Helena, Montana, earlier this year, a school budget referendum was approved four to one by the voters, while, at the same

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[1] For further evidence of the decline in voter support for tax and budget referenda, see Alexander & Boss (1974) and Osman & Grubb (1975).

time, a bond referendum for public housing for the aged was approved even more strongly (10-1).

One may legitimately ask why I am raising this comparison between voter support for school and nonschool referenda. The point of the comparison is that those who are likely to vote yes on nonschool money issues are the same persons who are likely to vote yes on school tax and bond referenda. The correlation between these two kinds of yes votes has been strongly established by the available evidence. For example, in a study commissioned by the National Endowment for the Arts to determine the profile of the supporters of performing arts activities and museums, Dimaggio and others (1978) found, after analyzing two hundred and seventy studies, that supporters had more education, higher incomes, and professional/managerial occupations--precisely the profile of those who vote yes on school referenda. That there exists a link between those who support the performing arts and those who support the schools was demonstrated in Portland, Oregon, recently where a bond issue for a performing arts complex was strongly approved by the voters at the same time that a $25 million levy for schools, previously rejected, was also approved. Precinct analysis suggested that the extensive campaign for the arts complex had significantly aided the passage of the school levy.

Although the amount of evidence concerning voter support of other local nonschool referenda is still quite tentative, these examples suggest that local tax and bond referenda for recreational, cultural, and gerontological services seemed to have been better supported in the seventies than have the schools. If this evidence marks the beginning

of a shift away from voter support for local school referenda to more support for these nonschool services, the full scope and ramifications of this shift will likely come into full view in the eighties, the implications of which will be discussed later in the paper.

State School Finance Referenda

If the seventies did not see voters reject every school proposition that raised local property taxes, neither did it see them support every school proposition that promised to lower them. For example, despite declining support for local school referenda, efforts to convince voters to support state constitutional changes that would reduce or bar reliance on the property tax to finance education met with total failure during the seventies. Thus in November 1972, the electorates in Oregon, Michigan, Colorado, and California decisively rejected constitutional amendments to shift the tax burden to the state level. Yet at the same time, public opinion polls indicated that most citizens wanted to eliminate the property tax. To explain the inconsistency in these states, analysts (Shalala et al., 1973) found, among other things, that loss of local control was one of the major popular objections to these amendments. As they concluded:

> This partially explains why, in every state, state school board associations opposed or remained neutral on the measures. Despite assurances by amendment supporters that state assumptions of education costs would not affect the governance of schools, almost every piece of literature from opposition education groups reveals genuine fear of loss of local control, particularly control of the level of taxation [p. 13].

A similarly strong rejection took place in Oregon in 1977 regarding

an effort to permit budgets to be adopted after two successive referenda rejections. Despite an all-out effort by state legislators, distinguished citizens, and state and local education groups (particularly teachers) to convince voters to support the plan, it was defeated by a two-to-one margin. The clue may have been found in a statewide preelection poll in which 60 percent said that the voters should have the "basic ability to close schools." This later finding (ignored by the media at the time) proved to be an accurate indication of public attitudes toward the trade-off between loss of local control and insurance against future school closures.

Tax and Spending Limitation Measures

In 1978, by an overwhelming margin of 65 to 35 percent, California voters approved Proposition 13, which limited property taxes on private homes and other real estate to 1 percent of market value. "The business community, labor, educational leaders, teachers, and public employees were all active in time and money in their opposition. Newspapers representing the bulk of the state's total circulation and major radio and TV stations editorialized regularly and fiercely against Proposition 13"(Field, 1978, p. 4). Later in the same year, tax or spending limitation measures were approved in thirteen states, but defeated in six others.

An analysis by Palaich (1980) of tax or spending limitation referenda in Colorado, Idaho, Michigan, and Oregon in 1978 sought to determine the relationship between attitudes toward the public schools and the vote on these propositions. Finding no consistent relationship

between attitudes toward schools (particularly those involving a desire to reduce school expenditures) and support for tax or spending limitation measures, Palaich concluded that there was no universal indication that public support for the public schools was significantly declining in the four states included in his study. He did find, however, that both older persons and home owners tended to favor a reduction in school expenditures, whereas those with more education thought expenditures should be maintained or increased. In addition, a study of the vote on Proposition 13 found that, while persons of each educational level supported the measure, only 54 percent of college graduates supported it, compared to 76 percent of those in favor who had only a high school education (Catterall & Threcher, 1978).

I had an opportunity to work on efforts to defeat a property tax limitation measure in Oregon in 1978. Our strategy centered on (1) identification of precincts that had high support and high turnout for schools, and (2) mobilization of many teachers to canvas those precincts to identify and urge the turnout of proschool voters. Post election analysis revealed the efficacy of that strategy. Major opposition to tax limitation came from precincts in major population areas where support for local school tax referenda had been consistently high in the past.

In the November 1980 election, property tax limitation measures were on the ballot in seven states. All were defeated except in Massachusetts, where the voters approved Proposition 2½ by 60 percent. If this trend in the failure rate of property tax and spending limitation measures continues, the eighties will likely witness the diminishing and eventual disappearance of this form of protest against state public service expenditures.

School Boards

One of the subjects considered in the search for evidence of public support for public education in the sixties and seventies was the character and stability of school boards. If there is public dissatisfaction with the operation of local public schools, it may be reflected in the changing composition of boards and in board members' shorter lengths of service.

Were people who normally served on boards--white, middle-aged, middle and upper-middle class home owners--still serving in the same numbers in the late seventies as they had in the early sixties? The decline in public support for education would seem to suggest that those who normally vote in finance referenda and run for school boards would be less inclined to do so. But not much change was noted in a recent review of the research on school board composition (McGinley, 1981). However, there has been a steady increase in the number of minority board members, especially in the cities, and of female board members (20 percent in 1980). Most of the change in composition has occurred in the big city boards. Drachler (1977) found "the white Protestant homogeneity of the board disappears as blacks, Jews, Catholics and . . . labor representatives were elected." By and large, though, boards are still the preserve of higher status men, as they have been since Counts' classic study in the mid-1920s.

Although the changes in board composition have been slight, there is some evidence that citizens may be expressing their unhappiness with schools by turning incumbent school board members out of office at a faster rate in the seventies than in the sixties. McGinley's

(1980) survey reports that board members were serving fewer years in the more recent period. This decrease appears to be occurring among newer board members, many of whom serve fewer than two years. Studies completed in 1980 by some state school board associations have also found length of service declining.

School Litigation

Although Americans have a long tradition of litigation, only in the relatively recent past have the courts become a scene for political action involving the schools. With the exception of the Supreme Court's landmark Brown decision in 1954, the courts more or less sustained the status quo in public schools throughout the fifties and much of the sixties. Furthermore, there was a general lack of legal interest in education: an average of less than 100 cases a year involving public schools were decided by state and federal courts during the most of this period.

The Supreme Court ushered in a new era of school litigation in 1969, however, when it decided the case of Tinker v. Des Moines, which extended First Amendment rights of free speech (within limits) to public school students. An explosive increase in school litigation followed Tinker. Much of this increase was the result of actions by legislative bodies, government agencies, civil rights organizations, and special interest groups. Yet individual citizens in ever-increasing numbers also sought redress through the courts for their grievances with schools--real or imagined. This occurred because they failed to defeat tax and bond referenda at the polls; were unhappy with board decisions

involving school closures, sex education, or the firing of a popular football coach; or were frustrated with school systems that granted high school diplomas to students who could not read or write well enough to fill out employment applications.

An analysis of the Yearbook of School Law between 1961 and 1980, tabulated in table 1, reveals the contrast in school litigation between the two decades. For example, between 1961 and 1970, there were twenty-eight cases of citizen efforts to reverse the outcome of tax and bond referenda. From 1971 to 1980, the number of such cases tripled to ninety, despite the fact that in nearly every case the courts sustained the outcome of the referendum.

The number of cases involving the removal of board members from office also grew significantly during the seventies. Between 1961 and 1970 such a recall election was rare--only three cases are recorded. These mainly involved persons convicted of a felony or guilty of gross incompetence or malfeasance. Although rarely successful in the courts (or the polling booth for that matter), recall election cases in the next decade increased seven-fold to twenty-one.

Beginning with the highly publicized case of Peter W. v. San Francisco Unified School District reported in the 1977 Yearbook, one educational malpractice suit has been reported each year since. Although none has been successful, and there is little likelihood a suit ever will succeed, the cases do demonstrate the considerable effort some parents will make to express their unhappiness with the quality of public education.

Table 1

School Bond, Tax, Recall, and Malpractice Cases Reported in the Twenty Volumes of the Yearbook of School Law from 1961-1980

Cases	1961-1970	1971-1980	Increase
Bond	14	42	+300
Tax	14	48	+343
Recall	3	21	+700
Malpractice	0	4	+400
Total	31	115	+371

Sources: The Yearbook of School Law, 1961, 1962, 1963, 1964, 1965, 1966, 1967, 1968, 1969, 1970, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1974, 1975, 1976, 1977, 1978, 1979, 1980. Danville, Illinois: Interstate Printers and Publishers, 1961...1971; Topeka, Kansas: National Organization on Legal Problems of Education, 1972...1980.

Public Opinion Polls

Evidence of public support for schools presented so far is only indirect. It deals with what citizens' actions concerning a selected aspect of schools--voting and ligigating--have been, not what they think about them in general. Also, the evidence is based on a relatively small minority of citizens--those who usually turn out for board elections or financial referenda and those, fewer still, who litigate. But how do Americans evaluate their schools, and has this judgment altered recently? Do schools do any better in this evaluation than other national institutions? For answers to these questions, we turn to another sort of evidence, public opinion polls.

Polls conducted by the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) have revealed that "public confidence in most institutional leaders declined in 1978 and the public confidence in the people running educational institutions fell to its lowest point in six years." (Condition of education, 1979, p. 38). However, the same study also revealed that public confidence in those running other institutions--such as Congress and the executive branch, major companies, medicine, and the press--also fell to its lowest level in six years. Moreover, despite all the outcry about school "failures," public confidence in those running education ran ahead of all other institutional leaders except doctors.

Other polls attempting to measure public trust in government officials and institutions tend to corroborate the NCES findings. Thus while the average trust in major institutions was 43 percent in 1966, the percentage had declined to 23 percent by 1979 (Dye & Zeigler, 1981).

Furthermore, trust in government among people at all levels of educational attainment declined during the seventies. In 1958, 57 percent of those with a college education were considered "most trusting," but twenty years later, that figure had declined to 28 percent (Hennesy, 1981). In 1964, 20 percent of those individuals questioned felt that the leaders did not know what they were doing, but by 1976 that figure had risen to 52 percent (Directions, 1978). Trust in Washington "to do right most of the time" also dropped sharply during the period: from 77 percent in 1964 to 36 percent in 1976 (Coming tax revolt, 1978).

Paralleling the decline in the public's confidence in those running schools is the public's increasingly negative attitudes toward the quality of those schools. In 1980, for example, only 35 percent of those surveyed in a Gallup Poll would give the schools an A or B rating compared to 48 percent in 1974 (Gallup, 1980, p. 35). Significantly, these attitudes were the same for parents with children in schools as it was for the general public.

An explanation for the public's negative attitudes toward schools may be found in Gallup's findings of the public's identification of the schools' major problems. These findings, tabulated in Table 2, reveal a remarkably consistent level of concern for lack of discipline, integration/segregation/busing, lack of proper financial support, difficulty in getting "good" teachers, and use of drugs. Improving school buildings, which ranked either fifth or sixth in polls from 1972-75, disappeared from the top six major problems in 1976 and was replaced by concerns over poor curriculum, which ranked either fourth or fifth

Table 2

PUBLIC OPINION REGARDING MAJOR PROBLEMS
CONFRONTING THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS DURING THE 1970s

	1970	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979
Lack of discipline	1	3	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Integration/segregation/ busing	2	2	3	2	2	2	2	2	4	6
Lack of proper financial support	3	1	2	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
Difficulty in getting "good" teachers	4	6	4	4	5	4	6	4	6	5
Use of drugs	6	5		5	4	6	5	6	2	2
Poor curriculum							4	5	5	4
Size of school/classes	5	4								
Improving school buildings and facilities			5	6	6	5				
Parents lack of interest			6							

Sources: Elam, S. M. (Ed.) A decade of Gallup polls of attitudes toward education 1969-1978. Bloomington, Indiana: Phi Delta Kappa, 1978; Gallup, G. H. The 11th annual Gallup poll of the public's attitudes toward the public schools. Phi Delta Kappan, 1979, 61, 33-46.

in annual polls for the rest of the decade. The last two years of the decade saw public opinion view integration/segregation/busing as less of a major problem and the use of drugs as more of one. Concern for lack of discipline, however, remained solidly in first place throughout the decade; in nine out of the ten years discipline was mentioned more often than any other major problem.

Although public confidence in schools declined in the seventies, public support for school spending cuts--at least at state and federal levels--did not increase. For example, when asked in 1978 how serious a loss it would be if the federal government cut back its current programs in education by one third, 71 percent labelled it a very serious loss. Only responses concerning health (76 percent) and social security (87 percent) were higher (Novak, 1978). Similarly, a poll in Idaho after the passage of that state's tax limitation measure revealed that 47 percent said that "if cuts had to be made, schools should be cut least. No other service was named by more than 11 percent of the respondents" (Elam, 1980, p. 13). Moreover, following the California, Colorado, Idaho, Michigan, and Oregon tax or expenditure limitation proposals in 1978, opinion studies found public schools ranked second behind police and firemen among citizens favoring the maintenance or increase in current service levels (Kirst, 1981).

On the other hand, when people were asked to consider spending levels of local governmental services, the public schools (25 percent) ranked second behind social services (42 percent) as spending too much money (Coming tax revolt, 1978). In addition, less than half (43 percent) of those surveyed in the tenth annual Gallup poll of attitudes

toward education said they were satisfied with the use of property taxes to finance schools, while 68 percent said they were satisfied with either state or federal sources (Elam, 1978, p. 361). When asked to name a preferred alternative method of school finance, "a surprisingly large number of persons volunteered the comment that people with children in the schools should pay a special tax and that the elderly and those without children in the schools should not have to pay any tax to support the public schools" (p. 362).

Conclusion

We have briefly surveyed several of the most salient and visible mechanisms through which public support for schools can be measured. All the pieces of evidence concerning these various indicators converge on a single conclusion: the public's willingness to support the public schools, both in terms of attitudes and finances, has weakened significantly during the past two decades. This attrition in support has not been universal among all sections of the population (it has been largely a phenomenon of the white middle and upper-middle classes), nor has it focused exclusively on the schools (the public's confidence in other societal institutions has declined as well). Furthermore, the evidence leads one to conclude that while support for schooling in the abstract remains relatively high, the public's attitude toward the quality of education provided by the public schools in particular has reached an all time low. Viewed from this perspective, the general unwillingness of voters to approve funds--at least at the local level--beyond that necessary to maintain basic educational services seems entirely rational.

Public Support: The Eighties

The indicators of public support for public schools discussed in the previous section are but surface manifestations of a complex and sometimes incomprehensible array of societal forces--demographic, socioeconomic, technological, and attitudinal--that have shaped that support, now seemingly more fragmented and uncertain than it was two decades ago. But what of the future? What of the eighties? Are these underlying forces, which now appear to be undergoing fundamental and far-reaching change, likely to continue, worsen, or improve the public support patterns of the last decade? Will public support improve in the eighties on the strength of, say, a renewed commitment to improve our institutions, or a return to basic family values, or a lessening of inflation? On the other hand, will support worsen as the fertility rate declines, as more women choose to work outside the home, or as more families purchase home computers to augment their children's education? This section will identify and briefly discuss some of these societal forces, indicate their possible strength and direction, and speculate on their likely influence on public support for schools in the eighties.

Societal Forces and Their Trends

Public education in the eighties will be subject to several societal forces, the trends of which will likely have a significant effect on public support. But before beginning an analysis of these trends, two cautions are in order. First, this discussion shall be neither comprehensive nor exhaustive. Quite the contrary. The limitations of

one's own expertise and the required length of this paper (30-50 pages) demand that the subject be treated succinctly (but hopefully without sacrifice to clarity). Second, trend forecasting is at best an inexact science. This statement is of course obvious to anyone who has had any recent experience investing in stocks, bonds, gold, or real estate on the advice of one's investment counselor or a guest expert on Wall Street Week.

With those two thoughts in mind, let us consider first some of the major demographic trends.

Demographic Trends

The age distribution of the U.S. population will change significantly for three age groups of importance to education. Among school-age children, the elementary cohort will decline in number until the mideighties but will rise thereafter, whereas the secondary cohort will continue to decline throughout the decade. The college-age cohort will drop sharply, whereas the young adult cohort (the "baby boom" sector) will rise sharply. Meanwhile both the older adults and over-sixty-five cohorts will continue to grow (Bouvier, 1980; Odden & Augenbrick, 1980; Frankel & Gerald, 1980; Porwoll, 1980; Wegmann, 1979; and Little, 1979).

As a group, all minorities have been increasing in number in the seventies and will continue to do so in the eighties--to compose nearly 15 percent of the population by the end of the decade. Although the degree varies by age, the pattern is not much different--cohort by cohort--from that noted for the total population. Minorities

in the college-age group will rise, whereas their white counterparts will fall, but otherwise the relative share of each cohort in the two populations will be similar (Odden & Augenbrick, 1980; Little, 1979; and Wegmann, 1979).

Family sizes are shrinking (from 3.14 persons per household in 1970 to 2.75 persons per household in 1980), reflecting several trends. More families have no children, there are fewer marriages and more divorces, and more children live in single-parent families (commonly with a female head). The majority of white children still live with two parents (down slightly from 89 to 85 percent in the seventies), but only half the black children live in two-parent households (down 58 to 47 percent). Both births and fertility rates have declined since 1960 to now less than the replacement rate. Data on women's expected lifetime births show that declining birth rates will probably continue, particularly among white women (Statistical abstract, 1980; Porwoll, 1980; Bouvier, 1980; Little, 1979; and Wegmann, 1979.)

In the late seventies, urban areas actually lost net population. Much of this shift is traceable to the fast-growing suburbs, increasingly the site of business and jobs, and the home for blacks. (Blacks' numbers in central cities held constant after the mid-seventies.) At the same time, however, it is also apparent that some of the population shift out of the urban areas bypassed the older suburbs in favor of smaller cities or genuinely rural areas. Furthermore, many well-established suburbs near older core cities (e.g., New York, Philadelphia, Chicago) also lost population in the seventies to smaller, more remote towns and cities (Porwoll, 1980; Kirst & Garms, 1980; Gober, 1979;

Deavers & Brown, 1979; and Wegmann, 1979.)

The population has also shifted regionally out of the Northeast and North-Central sections of the country and into the South and West. The two major population shifts of the seventies--metropolitan to non-metropolitan and cross-regional--are related. The fastest rural growth has been in the West, whereas the fastest suburban growth has occurred in the South (Porwoll, 1980; Gober, 1979; and Vaughan & Vogel, 1979).

Socioeconomic Trends

In the seventies the average worker's income fell and expenditures rose in real terms. This anomaly is explained chiefly by the increases in the percentage of Americans with jobs and in nonwage income, chiefly deriving from fringe benefits and borrowing. However, real family income rose in the seventies. If this trend continues, families, while typically smaller in the eighties, may have more money to spend. Families headed by females average only half the income of male-headed families, however. The economy in the eighties is expected to retain a relatively high rate of inflation and a relatively low rate of real growth (Earning less, 1981: Kirst & Garms, 1980; Wegmann, 1979; and Statistical abstract, 1979).

Meanwhile, poverty levels increased slightly in the central cities, where most poverty is concentrated, and decreased slightly in the suburbs and substantially in rural areas. Nonwhites continued to have lower incomes, as did citizens over sixty-five and families headed by women. Women's share of the labor force grew, however, (from 43 to 52

percent) and is projected to reach 60-70 percent by the end of the decade. Labor force participation is highest among divorced women but has been increasing most rapidly for married women with preschool age children (from 19 to 42 percent, 1960-1978), so that 54 percent of all mothers with children under six were in the labor force in 1978. These new workers increased family income, but it also meant reduced fertility rates and later marriages, resulting in smaller families with fewer children (Porwoll, 1980; Wegmann, 1980; Kirst & Garms, 1980; Little, 1979; Statistical abstract, 1979; and Nelson, 1979).

By 1980 it was clear that the less educated were more likely to be nonwhite, over forty-five (especially over sixty-five), and poor. If lack of education involves costs, so does its presence. Thus more educated women are also associated with lower fertility rates, indicating smaller families and fewer children.

Technological Trends

According to some futurists (Shostak, 1981; Toffler, 1980; Evans, 1979; Joseph, 1979), developments in communication technology--fiber optics, satellite transmission, cable television, and video recording devises--combined with an explosive growth in computers, especially microcomputers, may stimulate a major reordering of Western society. Consider, for example, the anticipated growth of but one component of this communications revolution: cable television. According to some industry experts, more than half the homes in America will have cable television by the end of this decade. Furthermore, cable television systems--some with 100 or more channels--will offer a mind-boggling

array of services to the home, e.g., fire and burglar security systems, video shopping, interactive education courses, and retrieval of news, bibliographic, and catalog information (Cable television, 1981).

The growth of cable television along with the development of other aspects of communications technology will undoubtedly have a major impact on the delivery of knowledge by the turn of the century.

But in the eighties, it appears that the development of microcomputers for home use could potentially have a more significant impact on public support for public schools than any other technological development during the decade. Five years ago home computers did not exist. Today, home computing "has statistically reached one in every 100 American households.... By the end of the '80s, that figure will be one in ten" (Wozniak, 1981).

Along with the rapid expansion of microcomputer hardware stimulated by such companies as Apple, Radio Shack, Texas Instruments, Atari (not to mention the flood of Japanese microcomputers expected to hit the American market in the next few years), several major publishing companies--Scott Foresman, Random House, Macmillan--are developing educational software for use by specific microcomputer systems. In addition, an army of small companies and kitchen table hobbiests are developing educational software for multiple hardware systems at a staggering rate.

Because of their interests, motivation, and ability to pay, upper-middle income persons have been the principal market for microcomputer sales since their introduction in the midseventies and are likely to remain so through the eighties. Unless the cost drops significantly,

(one can now purchase for $2,000 computer power that would have cost $100,000 prior to 1975) and ease of use improves dramatically (knowledge of computer programming is still essential for full utilization), the microcomputer will not likely sweep into American homes as television and calculators have done in the past two decades.

Attitudinal Trends

What values and beliefs are likely to influence American life in the eighties? Will the duty-to-self ethic of the last two decades give way to a more traditional one of duty to family, friends, church, and community? Or will search for self-fulfillment continue to dominate the ethic of the eighties? These are difficult, but important questions, whose answers can only be suggested in the next few pages. Difficult, because of the complexity of the topic; important, because values and beliefs are often powerful factors in the matrix of societal forces that form the underlying basis of support for public schools. If public attitudes toward schools were negatively influenced by the dominant norms of the "me first" generation of the sixties and seventies, perhaps in the eighties those attitudes will improve along with a return of that generation's values to something akin to those of the fifties.

For some Americans--approximately 20 percent of the population--traditional values of hard work, love of family, and belief in God remained unchanged during the last two decades. But for the other 80 percent of the population, who, according to Yankelovich (1981) accepted some or all of the values and beliefs associated with the search

for self-fulfillment during this period, the eighties may see a return, by some at least, to traditional (albeit modified) American values. "There are now snaps and shreds of evidence that American culture is evolving toward a new ethic of commitment. The word 'commitment' shifts the axis away from self (either self-denial or self-fulfillment) toward connectedness with the world" (p. 85).

But will this new ethic of commitment, as Yankelovich calls it, bring a renewal of public support for public schools? Let us consider the evidence. According to the results of public opinion polls by Yankelovich (1981) and Harris (1978), a majority of the "me" cum "we" generation is likely to continue to hold such values as dual-earner family, strengthened role of women in society, and the acceptability of marriage without children. Not much encouragement for the schools can be found here.

What of couples with children or those who expect to have them in the future? How will the new ethic of commitment accrue to the schools through them? Again, let us examine the evidence. Parents holding the "we" values of the eighties are expected "to make fewer sacrifices for their children than parents in the past, but they also [will] demand less from their offspring in the form of future obligations than their parents demand[ed] from them" (Yankelovich, 1981, p. 74). However, Yankelovich also found that the two-thirds majority who expressed a reduced commitment to children also wished to see a return "to more traditional standards of family love and parental responsibility" (Ibid). These traditional norms were supported by polls that showed, for example, 90 percent of American families "would still have children

if they 'had it to do over again'", 74 percent wanted their children "to be better off and more successful" than they were, and 57 percent agreed that "it's best to 'demand a lot' from children; they have to 'do their best to get ahead'" (Ibid).

Yankelovich went on to explain this apparent contradiction:

> [M]ajorities may claim, in the abstract, that they want to return to the family life of the past, but when it comes to specifics, only one out of five (21 percent) has any hankering to go back to traditional standards of sexual relations, to the spic-and-span housekeeping norms of the past, or to the male monopoly on working outside the home. Americans long for the warmth and closeness they associate with family life in earlier decades, but not if it means going back to the old rules. [p. 74]

So while the eighties may see many Americans seeking simpler lives and fewer, but more closely held relationships with those of shared interests, backgrounds, or values, many apparently will do so without children. And those with children will undergo less parental sacrifice than in the past. The implications of these changing values and beliefs for public support of schools will now be examined, along with the other societal trends discussed earlier.

Implications of the Trends

Speculating on the implications of demographic, socioeconomic technological, and attitudinal trends for public support of public schools in the eighties is a complicated and difficult task. The multiplicity of factors likely to influence public support are not easily correlated, nor are their relative degrees of influence easily measured (some are clearly more significant than others). One is therefore forced to

speculate on the effect of these societal forces on a more or less bivariate basis (if X, then Y), rather than on their interrelated and cumulative effect on public support. One's speculations, therefore, tend to be summative rather than discriminating, impressionistic rather than empirical.

The task is especially difficult for one whose training and experience as an academic has emphasized the analysis and interpretation of what is or has been, not what might be. Furthermore, academics on the whole (myself included) are rather disinclined to speculate on the course of future events--in writing at least--not so much out of fear of being wrong but in dread of forever being reminded so by one's colleagues.

Despite these reservations about the task before me, I nevertheless suggest two scenarios for public support in the eighties: one rather pessimistic, the other less so. First, the pessimistic one.

The Pessimistic Scenario

Most analysts who have written of late on the future of American education foresee further erosion and fragmentation of public support for public schools in this decade (Odden & Augenbrick, 1980; Kirst & Garms, 1980; Wood, 1980; Wegmann, 1979). This melanotic view is predicated, in large part, on the interpretation of demegraphic trends for mostly white, middle- and upper-middle class persons. Trends for this section of the population include a decline in the number of school-age children, continued low fertility rates, and an increase in couples with no children--all of which suggest both continued re-

duction in the "demand" for education and in the number of those most interested in its benefits: parents with school-age children. This will occur despite the fact there will be an increase in the age-group historically most involved with education--the 18-44 cohort.

At the same time, however, the increasing percentage of nonwhite school-aged children reflects an increase in the percentage of parents who are black, Hispanic, or belonging to another ethnic minority, as well as who are poor and live primarily in central cities. The relative increase of any group in the political system usually means it seeks more power. But minority groups, as well as the poor generally, are less politically active and more alienated, can contribute fewer resources to the political process, and have lower registration and turnout rates--and hence less political influence--on school and other elections.

Thus, according to the pessimistic scenario, minorities and the poor, while increasing in numbers and producing more children for the public schools to educate, cannot be expected to pick up the slack in both revenue and in political influence and support for public schools caused by the decline in white, middle- and upper-middle class "demand" for education.

At the same time those supporting public schools will be fewer, poorer, and politically weaker, the number of persons with no direct interest in education, as well as those with competing needs, will be growing. One such group are the forty-five to sixty-four year olds, who usually have no children in schools. Another group--those over sixty-five--will generate competing demands for other public services

at the state and local levels. Seniors are also on the average less well-educated and live on lower incomes; associated with these characteristics is increased opposition to educational expenditures. Moreover, because they have the time, seniors turn out more consistently (and frequently in higher numbers) than other age groups--particularly in local school finance referenda, from which they derive no direct benefit.

If predictions of a moderate to high inflation rate (8-10 percent per year) and a slow-growth economy for the eighties come to pass, public education will have to compete more vigorously for public funds with a variety of other services at all governmental levels. At the national level, competition will come from military spending, health case and social services for seniors, and services for handicapped and non-English-speaking persons, working mothers, and those with low vocational skills (Kirst & Garms, 1980). With the exception of defense expenditures, the same can be said for state-level revenue demands. At the local level, public education will have to compete for allocations with police, fire, sanitation, recreation, cultural, and retirement home services. In all these service sectors, costs are increasing (for familiar reasons), while tax sources, especially property taxes, are notoriously inelastic in adjusting to these demands. Those who provide educational services can no longer depend upon an inexhaustible pie of publically provided resources and a limited number of pie-eaters. Furthermore, the diverse interests competing for public funds will be as strong or stronger than those in the seventies, while the amount of public funds will be smaller, because of public

opposition to taxation, in general, and to local property taxes, in particular.

Considering these demographic and socioeconomic trends together, coupled with continuation in the present low levels of confidence in public education, it seems quite likely that public support for public schools--in terms of local expenditures, at least--will be little more than maintenance level in many school districts. An actual decline in expenditures is likely in other districts, particularly in the Northeast and North-Central regions of the country and in the older core cities and their surrounding suburbs.

Moreover, public schools face competition with other providers of educational services: private schools. Private education of the 5-17 age cohort increased gradually in the seventies and will likely rise slightly through 1988 (Frankel & Gerald, 1980). Because of the overall decline in this age cohort itself, the percentage of students in private education will increase slightly, rising from 12 percent to 14 percent of all students from 1978 to 1988.

These figures may be less than the actual percentages, because enrollments in fundamentalist religious schools--the fastest growing sector of private school growth in the seventies--can only be estimated. The overall percentage of children enrolled in private education may already be at or near the 14 percent figure projected for the late eighties. Therefore, even if the spectacular growth in fundamentalist

schools slows, as it likely will,[2] the expected growth in other private nonparochial schools may push private school enrollments to 16 or 17 percent of all students by the end of the eighties. This figure may even be exceeded if Congress enacts tuition tax credit legislation by 1982, if private schools are more aggressive and creative in adopting microcomputers for classroom use than are the public schools, or if confidence in public schools continues to decline. One implication of the growth in private schools is the further reduction in private-school-related parents' support for public education for which they are being taxed.

This scenario becomes even more gloomy if one adds the trend in the growth of microcomputers, to say nothing of cable television, to the mixture of forces likely to affect public support for schools. Assuming continued increases in the purchase of microcomputers by upper-middle and (as price and difficulty of use decline) middle-class parents, it is quite possible that a significant number of these parents will, by using increasingly more powerful and accessible educational software, either supplement deficiencies in their children's education or enrich what they perceive as a merely adequate one from the public schools. Parents so inclined will likely feel less inclined to support public schools with their tax dollars, choosing rather to use the money saved to purchase additional educational software for their children.

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[2] This decline is predicated on the assumption that many parents who now send their children to fundamentalist religious schools--mostly middle or lower-middle class whites--will be less able to afford to do so in the slow growth, moderate to high inflationary economy of the eighties.

As mentioned earlier, some of these dissatisfied parents may also begin sending their children to private schools--many of which may be more receptive than public schools to using computers in reducing costs and improving instruction. But, it is also conceivable that as instructional software grows more sophisticated and increasingly capable of serving as surrogate teacher, these parents may withdraw their children from schools (either public or private) altogether and tutor them at home with the help of the home computer. As a possible straw-in-the-wind trend in that direction, there is now a small, but growing, number of parents around the country who are withdrawing their children from school in favor of teaching them at home. "Worried about everything from drugs to discipline in public and even some private institutions, an estimated 10,000 to 30,000 families are believed to be involved in home schooling today--and the number could double in the next two to three years" (Armstrong, 1981)

Furthermore, certain attitudinal changes discussed earlier in this section may contribute to the loss of public support for public schools in the eighties. Of particular importance is the projected weakening of the traditional obligation of parents to make sacrifices for their children. If the percentage of the population holding this view--particularly prevalent among younger parents with higher incomes, education, and occupations--continues to increase as expected, the schools may not receive the level of support from this cohort that has occurred in the last two decades. In other words, a reduction in parental obligation for their children may evolve into an unwillingness to support school budgets or bond referenda that increase local taxation and

reduce parental pursuits of other interests. It is already evident, for example, that affluent, well-educated, professionally employed parents (as well as nonparents) are more likely to support public spending for parks, beaches, and performing arts centers than for public schools. And even if the ethic of commitment replaces that of self-fulfillment in the eighties as Yankelovich predicts it will, there is no evidence that this "me" to "we" shift will benefit the public schools, particularly as they are now perceived. As mentioned earlier, children, and by analogy public schools, are less important to those seeking closer ties with and commitment to friends, family, and community.

The Less Pessimitic Scenario

There are, however, a few mediating factors that could mean the foregoing scenario may not be as discouraging to educators, or as universal in its impact, as it may appear.

First, while minorities have lower turnout rates than whites, blacks, in particular, have consistently showed higher support for public education than whites. Furthermore, the years since 1955 have witnessed many examples of increased political activism by minority groups on a number of issues, including education. Therefore, assuming that minority turnout for school referenda continues to increase and that support, already strong, does not decline, the growing minority segment of parents may well turn out to be the major source of support for public schools in the eighties, particularly in metropolitan centers.

Second, there is the reality of geographic variation. The West and the South are increasing their populations--in non-metropolitan and suburban areas. These areas are also increasing in average income, education, and percentage of young couples with children, the groups that have tended to exhibit greater levels of support for education than the general population. The large and growing minority populations (particularly Hispanics in the Southwest) in the so-called "Sunbelt" states could become, as mentioned earlier, the basis of support for public schools. The strength of this support will depend on the ability of political leaders to persuade minorities to become more involved in the political process through increased voter registration and participation in partisan as well as nonpartisan state and local elections. The implications of this demographic change are that the pessimistic scenario previously described may be more true of the highly urbanized Northeast and North Central areas than of the West or the South.

Third, there is the question of personal and family income available for educational expenditures. The increase in the number of income-earners and hence in per-capita real spending, together with the decrease in the number of students, will mean a higher taxpayer-to-student ratio, which may mean that tax rates could be reduced without reducing actual expenditures on education (Kirst & Garms, 1980). This may make educational spending more palatable to those with little or no direct interest in education. On the other hand, a projected sluggish economy and moderate to high inflation rate, coupled with

double-digit teacher salary demands, could mean that lowered tax rates would result in reduced expenditures on education, particularly at the local level. To maintain a constant level of educational expenditures through the eighties under these circumstances, most districts would continue to need to receive increased financial support from state and federal sources.

Lastly, the pessimistic scenario for public support of schools in the eighties assumes the continuation--if not the worsening--of the problems that have plagued public schools since the midsixties, problems that have contributed substantially to the public's perception of their low quality. But what if the slide in public confidence is about to "bottom out"? There is recent evidence--albeit fragmentary and impressionistic--to suggest that this may happen soon, if indeed it hasn't done so already. The National Assessment of Educational Progress reported this spring that substantial increases in elementary school reading scores occurred during the end of the seventies. The use of drugs--especially marijuana--declined 21 percent among high school students last year. The high school prom is back, and so is short hair, button-down shirts, crew neck sweaters, and saddle shoes. More and more school districts are now offering the kind of rigorous, differentiating, firm-handed education--either systemwide or as an alternative--that many American parents seem to want. If these trends continue and are accompanied by signs of improved student behavior, better language skills, and higher SAT scores, some of the loss of

public confidence in and support for public schools may well be restored by the end of this decade.

Can the federal government do anything to help insure that the less pessimistic scenario becomes the dominant reality of the eighties? Are there any options available to federal policy-makers that can, in the words of a popular song of the forties, "accentuate the positive, eliminate the negative" aspects of public education, thereby improving public confidence and support? Or is public opinion about schools unaffected by federal policy? The answers to these and other related questions will be discussed on the next (and final) section of this paper.

Public Support: the Federal Role

The directions for preparing this paper included a request that the author suggest appropriate alternative federal strategies in response to probable changes in public support and attitudes toward public schools in the eighties. That request, of course, is based on the implicit assumption that federally initiated strategies can affect changes in public support and attitudes toward schools by enhancing the beneficial attitudes and reducing or eliminating those that are counterproductive. In other words, a discussion of the federal role vis a vis public support assumes a link between what the federal government actually does to improve public education in this country and what the public thinks it does. Furthermore, this assumed public understanding of the federal role can be translated, if the public perceives that role to be positive, into improved public support for schools.

Are these assumptions correct? Do federal policy initiatives have an impact--direct or indirect--on public attitudes toward schools? The evidence at our disposal leads us to question whether that impact is substantial. Of all the major school problems that have been shown by opinion polls to be responsible for the decline in public confidence in schools, only one can be linked to federal policy: busing to achieve racial desegregation. It is the courts rather than federal educational policy-makers that have initiated and sustained busing as a solution to cure the nation's racial problems. The courts are hardly a candidate for significant action by educational policy-makers in the near future.

For the most part, federal strategies of the past have been aimed at dealing with the consequences, not the causes, of the decline in

public support. The reason, of course, is that the causes of public attitudes lie in societal trends, which are embedded in this country's changing demography, economy, technology, and values and which, therefore, are not subject to any significant degree of influence by federal policy toward education. On the other hand, it is quite possible that the reverse is true. Certain societal forces of the last three decades--particularly economic, demographic, and social--have shaped public opinion, which in turn may have influenced federal policy toward education. The relationship can be inferred, perhaps, from some recent research by Page and Shapiro (1981) on the influence of powerful and prolonged public opinion on foreign policy. If this link between public opinion and federal policy decisions is indeed applicable to education, there is certainly no indication in the societal trends analyzed in this paper to support a continuation of the high level of direct involvement that has characterized federal education policy since the midsixties. Quite the contrary. There is certainly going to be less, not more, federal involvement with education for at least the next three years.

This is not to say that federal education policy of the last decade and a half should be abandoned. This policy has focused on improving the quality of educational opportunity for minorities, the handicapped, the poor and women. For the most part these policies have been successful and, if necessary to maintain present levels of achievement for these groups, they should be continued. While these federal education policies may not have curtailed the decline in public support for schools during the last decade, a significant reduction in federal monetary support for schools may precipitate further decline

in public support levels. Certainly there is reason to believe that the hoped for support of public schools among blacks, Hispanics, and other minorities discussed in the previous section will be seriously eroded in the face of massive cutbacks in federal aid to educational programs whose major beneficiaries are those groups.

On the other hand, the preceding analysis of societal trends suggests that new federal strategies--aimed at improving public support--should be initiated. Clearly the federal government should provide additional funds in the form of block grants to states to purchase microcomputer hardware and software, establish day care facilities for working mothers, and provide continuing education programs for middle-aged adults and seniors. Furthermore, money provided to the states in the form of block grants could be used to enhance education improvements initiated at the local level in reaction to public demands. One such improvement, the back-to-basics movement, developed in response to declining language and math skills as well as in response to the demand for stricter student discipline. Back-to-basic schools are operating in several states, and their enthusiastic support by many parents has had an influence on the curriculum of many regular elementary schools.

Another grass roots demand on the public schools was for more learning options and parental involvement in exercising those options. This public demand led to the implementation of alternative schools in many school districts. Where implemented, public response has been very favorable and thus can have a significant impact on the level of public satisfaction. For example, in the early seventies, the Minneapolis school system initiated an education option program that gave

parents a choice of four different kinds of elementary school learning environments. In four years, the program raised parents' satisfaction levels from 35 percent to 85 percent. (Clinchy & Cody, 1978).

Another example of the impact of public choice and public satisfaction occurred last year in the Portland, Oregon, school district. A new middle school, opened in a largely black neighborhood, offered a curriculum emphasizing the visual and performing arts, ethnic studies, science, and the use of microcomputers. Requests for attendance, particularly from white parents, were immediate and substantial. Some white parents who had previously enrolled their children in private schools sought admission to the new middle school.

School-based management, though less well known than either the back-to-basics or alternative education, has also been implemented in some states in response to parental demands for choice and involvement. With school-based management, each individual school becomes the locus of educational decision-making. Accompanying this change in governance is a major change in the role of the principal, who assumes greater authority as the chief actor in educational management, though not without the active involvement of parents, teachers, and students.

Furthermore, under this system, each school's staff and community can design the school's educational philosophy to reflect their own specific demographics, values and beliefs, and educational preferences, instead of having to follow a districtwide curriculum mandate.

Another major benefit of school-based management is its drastic reduction in the size of the unit of governance and the corresponding size of each unit's constituency. Instead of being one parent among, say, 250,000 in a district, he or she is one of only 500 parents in a

school. The potential of school-based management to elicit a greater sense of efficacy among parents and their community members who wish to involve themselves in school affairs is thus apparent.

These anticipated educational benefits of block grants funding presuppose, of course, that state departments will uniformly have the capacity to respond in these and other ways to the improvement of public support for public schools. One suspects, however, that much variation exists from state to state as to the quality of programs and personnel in the state departments of education. There is also little if any research on the level of public confidence in state departments of education to improve the quality of education in their respective states. Limited observation of public reaction to perceived state department effectiveness suggests a strong link with public approval of the job performance of the superintendent of public instruction.

In summary then, although there is scanty evidence that the federal government has any influence on public support for public schools one way or the other, it would be irresponsible to suggest that federal policy should adopt a policy of "doing good by doing little" (Kirp, 1979). Federal education policy should continue to maintain current levels of support for the disadvantaged while at the same time supporting programs--primarily through bloc grants--responsive to parental demands for education choice, involvement, and improved quality. Will these responses, modest though they may be, combined with some positive indicators of improved school quality discussed earlier, help to restore some of the loss in public support and confidence in the schools? Let us hope so. For if the pessimistic scenario

becomes the dominant reality, it could trigger a significant reshaping of education in this country that may well lead to the "disassembling of American schools" (Wood, 1980) by the end of this decade.

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